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ABSTRACT

Research studies have shown that the benefits of student participation in cocurricular activities are substantial. However, many schools reward or punish student achievement and conduct by setting eligibility standards for participation in student activities. In such a system, educators view activities primarily as rewards for good behavior and acceptable grades, not as learning experiences per se. If school board members are to be accountable for school activities policies, they must have adequate and appropriate participation in the process at both local and state levels. A solution is activity chartering: the process of integrating student activities into the policy and curriculum process. An effective activity charter contains the following information: (1) the purposes and goals of the activity; (2) a needs statement; (3) a membership roster; (4) a financial plan; (5) sponsors of the organization; and (6) a description of how the behavior expected of individual members as well as the group's activities will contribute to the overall goals of the program. Typically, charters extend over a 3- or 4-year cycle, organized so that a portion of the activities are evaluated each year. Steps of the chartering process are explained, and a sample criterion-based system for reviewing the charters and a sample activities charter are included. (MLF)

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Updating SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES

Volume 20/Number 4/April 1989

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Student activities: education or recreation?

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Student cocurricular activities consume enormous amounts of resources—time, money, manpower, and personal energy. Most educational leaders appear to be in agreement that such activities not only are worthwhile but essential for the development of the "whole person."

Research studies have shown, time and time again, that the benefits of student participation are substantial. A pupil's long-term commitment to an activity is a better predictor of success and creativity in later life than is any academic measure. Participants tend to have higher grade-point averages, better attendance records, lower dropout rates, and fewer discipline problems than do students in general.

This should come as no surprise. Student activities promote positive self-esteem and can provide a school's best laboratory for learning human relations, leadership, and social skills. All too often, though, student activities are neglected in terms of policy direction and simply are allowed to grow (or die) on their own.

Left to their own devices . . . .

Most school systems place priority on curriculum, student discipline, and activities—in that order. In fact, many schools reward or punish student achievement and conduct by setting eligibility standards for participation in student activities. For instance, students who do not meet certain standards are banned from activities for a designated time or until the achievement or conduct improves. In such a system, educators view activities primarily as rewards for good behavior and acceptable grades, not as learning experiences, per se.

By allowing organizations to develop separate identities, school boards take the risk of sanctioning activities that are inconsistent with or in conflict with the schools' mission. Take sports as an example. Many students, parents, and coaches view school sports primarily as a means for individual stardom or a team championship, rather than as a way to learn leadership, sportsmanship, and teamwork. In such environments, athletic programs (and coaches) survive if they win, not if their players merely develop character and discipline.

Many athletic programs receive little or no scrutiny by the board. According to Jim Wickless (past president of the Nebraska Association of School Boards) writing in the *Nebraska School Leader* (Spring 1988): "If board members are to be accountable for activities policies (and we are), we must have adequate and appropriate participation in the process at both local and state levels."

A solution: activity chartering

Activity chartering is the process of integrating student activities into the policy and curriculum process. Boards, then, have the opportunity to set learning goals for each activity.

An effective activity charter contains the following information:

- the purposes and goals of the activity;
- a needs statement;
- a membership roster;
- a financial plan;
- sponsors of the organization; and
- a description of how the behavior expected of individual members as well as the group's activities will contribute to the overall goals of the program.

How it works

The chartering process occurs in two distinct phases: the charter and the annual educational plan. Typically, charters extend over a three- or four-year cycle, organized so that a portion of the activities are evaluated each year. The length of the cycle depends on the maximum number of years a student could participate in the activity—less one year. In other words, the charter of a debate club open to students for all four years of high school would be renewed every three years. As a rule of thumb, a four-year high school uses a three-year charter cycle. Shorter participation cycles tend to create continuity problems for certain broad-based activities having a variety of possible goals.

To obtain a charter, the members of the student organization (working with the group's sponsor, advisor, or coach) develop the material for review and approval by the school activities director and principal. Principals should use a criterion-based system for reviewing the charters. (A sample form is included in the school administrator's copy of this publication.)

The principal forwards the approved charter to the superintendent and school board for final review. At this level, relevant factors include the quality of the building-level evaluation and the degree to which the activity's goals are consistent with those of the school system. Annually, the board announces the list of approved activities (both initial charters and renewals).

During each year of the charter, the organization submits an educational plan to the principal. Like a yearly lesson plan, the document specifies the program's goals, major activities, budget, officers, and sponsors.

Activities as policy

A process requiring board approval of student activities communicates an important message to the school community. Placed within the school policy process, activity programs are seen as learning activities that fall squarely within overall school goals and procedures.

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Dr. Christensen is superintendent of North Platte (NE) Schools and an author in the field of education.

Charter Timetable

Step	*Responsibility*	*Timeline*
Notification to organization that charter is due	building principals	May (previous year)
Charter due to principal	officers, student members, and sponsors	November
Principal reviews	principal	December
Recommendation submitted to superintendent	principal	January
Board of Education review and action	superintendent	March
Announcement of approved action	superintendent	May

Annual Educational Plan Timetable

Steps	*Responsibility*	*Timetable*
Complete and submit Annual Educational Plan to building principal	officers, student members, and sponsors	September
Review and approval by principal	principal	October
Listing of approved Annual Educational Plans to superintendent	principal	October

Student Activities: Charter Review and Evaluation

Criterion	***Rating***				
	High		***Avg***		***Low***
1. Congruence of purposes and goals with school's learning goals.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Congruence of purpose stated in constitution and goals of charter.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Congruence of goals with activities.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Consistency of membership policies with school policies.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Levels of participation among various grades and sexes.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Effectiveness of financing plans.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Cost-benefit ratio.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Other (Specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
Overall Rating:	1	2	3	4	5

Signed _____ **Date** _____

Annual Educational Plan

All student activities, clubs, and organizations each year will submit their charters for approval.

Organization: _____

Date: _____

Goals for Year

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Major Activities: _____

Estimated Budget: _____

Financing/Fund-raising:

Dues: _____

Fund-raising: _____

Other Revenues: _____

Officers: _____

Other: _____

Sponsors: _____

TO BE SUBMITTED TO BUILDING PRINCIPAL

_____ **Approved** _____ **Date**

_____ **Not Approved*** _____ **Date**

***Reason(s):** _____

Principal **Date**

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A Sample Activities Charter

All student activities, clubs, and organizations maintain current charters. Charters are adopted by the Board of Education every three years. Annual Educational Plans are approved by appropriate building administrators.

Organization: _____ Date: _____

Statement of Purpose: _____

Organizational Goals: _____

_____

Need Statement: (What known need is being addressed by this organization?) _____

_____

Major Activities: (What are the major activities of this organization?) _____

_____

Benefit Statement: (What benefits do students receive from participation?) _____

_____

Membership:

History: Current Membership _____

Previous Years _____

19 ____–____ _____

Age/grade levels of current members:

9th _____ 11th _____

10th _____ 12th _____

Methods of Selection: _____

_____

Financing:

Estimated Annual Budget: _____

Dues: _____

Fund-raising Activities: _____

_____

Other Revenues: _____

_____

Sponsorship:

Sponsors/Advisors: _____

_____ 1. Copy of organizational constitution

_____ 2. Copy of meeting minutes when application was approved by organization

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SUBMIT TO BUILDING PRINCIPAL

_____ Approved _____ Date _____ Initials

_____ Rejected* _____ Date _____ Initials

*Reasons _____

_____ _____

Superintendent of Schools Date